

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of strategic planning is to ask important questions about the future. What will the future look like in 5 years? What will the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Civil Rights need to do to succeed? How will we know if we have been successful? What are the challenges we will be facing? Will we be ready for those challenges?

The ASCR Strategic Plan is the answer to these questions. The Plan establishes one unified goal that places emphasis on fair and equitable services and benefits to USDA customers while upholding the civil rights of its employees, with supporting programmatic objectives. These objectives contain the indicators we need to achieve our goal, with critical timelines, and defined methods to determine our success. There is no way to predict the future, but it is possible to identify and forecast the forces of change shaping the Department and the challenges facing ASCR in helping the Department meet its mission, objectives and management initiatives.

This strategic plan is ASCR's response to the identification of those challenges. The plan takes an enterprise approach while focusing on results: indicators with measurable performance metrics. It is a fluid and flexible document capable of adapting to changing programmatic priorities.

Over the next five years we will concentrate on meeting the objectives identified in our strategic plan. We will strengthen our partnerships with 1890 and 1994 Land-Grant Institutions and community-based organizations. We will work closely with our agency and office partners in ensuring that the Department increases the number of national scholars from the pool of talented applicants that we will devise. We will conduct workshops and provide technical assistance to the 1890 and 1994 communities so that they fully understand the benefits of partnering with USDA.

We will work to achieve a more efficient outreach program for all customers, with emphasis on socially and economically disadvantaged persons, with assistance from the Outreach Planning Working Group. The ASCR will work proactively to strengthen its partnerships with community and faith-based organizations and educational institutions, as well as create new partnerships with these entities.

The importance of an environment that allows all employees to be successful in meeting the Department's objectives cannot be understated. To that end, the ASCR will better inform the workforce of the benefits of alternative methods of resolving workplace and programmatic disputes.

ASCR has important regulatory oversight responsibilities. Therefore, we will work toward ensuring agencies and offices understand the various statutes and regulations that govern alternative dispute resolution, civil rights and equal employment opportunity (EEO), and that they receive assistance in complying with these authorities. We also have legally mandated and regulatory timelines for completing actions associated with both EEO and program discrimination complaints. Those regulatory timelines will be met while reducing processing times and improving efficiency.

Our employees are pivotal to assuring our success in accomplishing all that we have set out to do in the next five years. It is imperative that our employees possess the necessary skills to be successful. Our executives and managers play critical roles in achieving results and ensuring that their staff is fully aware of their responsibilities for carrying out the strategic plan. We will also upgrade technology as necessary to meet performance targets and measure results. It is the Strategic Plan and the metrics we established to gauge our success that will allow us to adjust and modify our strategies so that we can continue to deliver the best possible performance for the employees and customers of USDA.